

Remarks by USAID/Azerbaijan Mission Director Mikaela Meredith at Conference Acknowledging the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons

Nakhchivan

29 July, 2016

General Asadullayev, Head of Counter-Trafficking Main Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Colonel Taghiyev, Head of Organizational Inspection Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Mr. Isaczai, UN Resident Coordinator, Ambassador Filipovic, Head of Council of Europe Office, Ms. Szabados, IOM Regional Director, South Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Serhan, IOM Chief of Mission, excellencies, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am very pleased to join this event recognizing the “World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.”

The United States has been working for many years now, with Azerbaijanis and others around the world to fight the scourge of human trafficking, something that can only be described as a contemporary form of slavery.

As Secretary of State Kerry noted last month to an audience in Washington,

“Make no mistake... When we talk about ‘human trafficking,’ we’re talking about slavery - modern-day slavery that still today claims more than 20 million victims on any given time. And all 20 million are people just like everybody here. They have names. They have or had families in many cases. And they are enforced to endure a hell – a living hell in modern times that no human being should ever have to experience.

So when we talk today about this serious problem, I hope we can all work to try and keep in our mind the faces of the victims: That we are talking about individual human beings, each one deserving of respect for their basic, inalienable human dignity. The victims are people who could be the family member of anyone here today.

While we continue to work hard and have seen an increased awareness and a number of successes, human trafficking remains prevalent and is a major concern for individuals and governments. Human traffickers have continued to find ways to try to avoid detection by law enforcement and to find new areas of profit. Given this reality, government and the public must support the needs of their law enforcement bodies to combat this continuously evolving crime. At the same time,

the United States and its partners must ensure efforts to combat this crime continue to address the needs of victims. This has been particularly true in light of recently identified global trends that include an increased incidence of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation, the recognized under-identification of male victims, and the documented rise in the number of children being identified as victims.

Our assistance to Azerbaijan is, and always has been, a partnership. Today, U.S. assistance continues to support priorities identified by the Government of Azerbaijan in its “Vision for the Future: 2020” development concept. One of these priorities is countering human trafficking. Since October 2015, USAID and International Organization for Migration have worked together to combat human trafficking through the ‘Counter-Trafficking in Persons’ Activity. This project supports shelters for the victims of human trafficking and enhances the capacities of shelters for those victims. The CTIP will provide legal, social, psychological and rehabilitation assistance to human trafficking victims who are in those shelters.

I would like to also note the Department of State sponsored program on “Enhancing Cooperation Measures to Effectively Combat Trafficking in Persons through Capacity Building and Technical Assistance in Azerbaijan” and implemented by IOM. This project aims to enhance the technical capacity of health care professionals in identifying human trafficking victims and caring for victims by providing them with relevant assistance. This project is in partnership with the Centre for Assistance to Victims of Trafficking of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population.

To this end, I would like to thank the Government of Azerbaijan for its work with the United States and its continued support of IOM’s Counter Trafficking activities in the country, as well as for its many other ongoing efforts to combat this heinous crime. I would like to commend the Government of Azerbaijan as well for its continued efforts to implement its National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, which was enacted in July 2014. The approach embodied within this document demonstrates Azerbaijan’s commitment to continue to tackle human trafficking at all levels.

I wish you a fruitful discussion throughout the day and hope that this exercise will be valuable in enhancing your ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking in Azerbaijan.

Thank you.